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**NOAA ANNOUNCES \$114,188 TO HELP RESTORE FISHERY HABITAT
IN STUMP SOUND, N.C.**

The U.S. Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) awarded \$114,188 to the North Carolina Coastal Federation for a community-based project to restore fishery habitat in Stump Sound, Onslow County, N.C. The project is funded by the Community-based Restoration Program within the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries).

Coastal Federation Executive Director Todd Miller said the restoration project will create four acres of oyster habitat, protect and restore 200 feet of salt marsh, implement a community wide outreach program and educate thousands of individuals about the value of oysters, their link to water quality and the need to conserve them.

"NOAA and the Bush Administration are committed to working with regional authorities to improve our understanding of the environment. This grant will help restore fishery habitat in Stump Sound," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "It builds awareness, appreciation, knowledge and an understanding of the NOAA Restoration Center's Community-based Restoration Program."

Oysters help to stabilize fisheries habitat through their complex structure and their ability to act as a natural water filtration system. According to Charles H. (Pete) Peterson, a researcher at the University of North Carolina's Institute of Marine Sciences, "You can hardly find a species more central to the functioning of an estuarine system than an oyster."

Unfortunately, in recent years, harvest pressure in Stump Sound has out-paced the productivity of native oyster populations. This combined with additional runoff impacts from pollutants has caused the water quality in the sound to deteriorate rapidly.

In an effort to restore Stump Sound to a more stable estuarine system, the North Carolina Coastal Federation has created a comprehensive project to address the needs of this watershed. "Oyster habitat and water quality of Stump Sound will certainly benefit as a result of the NOAA Community-based Restoration Program's support for this project", said Miller. "NOAA grants have allowed the federation to implement several significant wetland, oyster and estuarine shoreline restoration projects, working with thousands of citizens to help restore and protect the coast."

"Protecting and restoring essential fish habitat is critical to our efforts to manage the nation's fisheries," said Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region administrator. "Estuary restoration is a national priority and we join with our federal, state and local partners to make this project a reality."

The NOAA Community-based Restoration Program has been working with community organizations to support locally-driven habitat-restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas since 1996. NOAA-funded projects provide strong on-the-ground habitat restoration components that offer educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. To date, nearly 800 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Community-based Restoration Program: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>